Mark Twain Explores a New Legend of the Round Table.

A recent monthly meeting of the Military Service Institution on Governor's Island was made entertaining by Mark Twain, who read a paper, the announcement of which caused the thronging of the old museum hall. Gen. W. T. Sherman and Gen. Schofield were present. Gen. James B. Fry presided.

Mr. Clemens said that which he was about to read was part of a still uncompleted book, of which he would give the first chapter by way of explanation, and follow it with selected fragments, "or outline the rest of it in bulk, so to speak; do as the cowboy admonished his spiritual adviser to do, 'just leave out the details, and heave in the bottom facts.'"

Mr. Clemens' story is the autobiography of Sir Robert Smith of Camelot, one of King Arthur's knights, formerly a manufacturer of Hartford, Conn. Robert Smith says of himself:

"I am a Yankee of the Yankees, a practical man, nearly barren of sentiment or poetry—in other words my father was a blacksmith, my uncle was a horse doctor, and I was both. Then I went over to the great arms factory and learned my real trade—learned to make everything, guns, revolvers, cannon, boilers, engines, electric machines, anything, in short, that anybody wanted anywhere in the world. * * * I became head boss and had 1,000 men under me. Well, a man like that is full of fight—that goes without saying. With 1,000 rough men under one, one has plenty of that sort of amusement.

"Well, at last I met my match; I got my dose. It was during a misunderstanding conducted with iron crowbars with a fellow we used to call Hercules. He laid me out with a crusher alongside the head that made everything crack, and seemed to make every joint of my skull lap over on its neighbor, and then the world went out in darkness, and I felt nothing more, knew nothing more for a while, and when I came to again I was standing under an oak tree, and the factory was gone.

"Standing under an oak tree on the grass with a beautiful broad country, a landscape spread out before me, all to myself. No, not quite, not entirely to myself. There was a fellow on a horse looking down at me—a fellow fresh out of a picture book. He was in old time armor from his head to his heel. He had a helmet on like a cheese box, with slits in it, and he carried a shield and a sword and a prodigious spear. And his horse had armor on, too, and gorgeous silken trappings, red and green, that hung around him like a bedgown to the ground. And this apparition said to me:

"'Fair sir! will you joust?'

"Said I: 'Will I which?'

"'Will you joust? Will you break a lance for land or lady?'

"Said I: 'What are you giving me? You go along back to your circus, or I'll report you.'

"Now what does this fellow do but fall back a couple of hundred yards and then come tilting at me, as hard as he could drive, his cheese box down close and his long spear pointing straight at me. I saw he meant business, so I was up the tree when he arrived. Well, he allowed I was his property; the captive of his spear. Well, there was argument on his side and the bulk of the advantage, so I judged it best to humor him, and we fixed up an agreement. I was to go along with him, and he wasn't to hurt me. So I came down and we started away, I walking by the side of his horse, and we marched comfortably along through glades and over brooks that I could not remember to have seen before. It puzzled me ever so much, and yet we didn't come to any circus, or any sign of a circus, so I gave up the idea of a circus, and concluded he was from an asylum. But we never came to any asylum, so I was up a stump, as you may say."

And so the two wander on together, and amid scenes of human life that afford the author many opportunities for quaint philosophic contrasts and dry humor, until they come to Camelot, to the court of King Arthur. Fanciful and curious are the reflections of the transposed Yankee about that place—which he at first thinks must be the asylum—in its country of soft reposeful summer landscape, as lovely as a dream and lonesome as Sunday; where the air was full of the smell of flowers and the buzzing of insects and the twittering of birds, and there were no people or wagons or life or anything going on.

Very vividly he portrays the scene at Camelot, where King Arthur, with his knights, sits at a round table as big as a circus ring, and 300 dogs fight for bones around them, while the musicians are in one gallery high aloft and the ladies in another. But before he gets in there he seeks information from a plain-looking man in the outer court, saying to him: "'Now, my friend, do me a kindness. Tell me, do you belong to the asylum, or are you just here on a visit, or something like that?' And he looked me over stupidly and said: 'Marry! Fair sir,——' 'Oh!' I said, 'that will do. I guess you are a patient.' To another he said: "Now, my friend, if I could see the head keeper just a minute—only just a minute.' He said: 'Prithee do not let me.' 'Let you what?' 'Do not hinder me, if the word please thee better,' and he was an under cook, and had no time to talk, though he would like to another time, for it would just comfort his very liver to know where I got my clothes."

Then another, a lad, came to him saying that he was a page. "'Oh! go along,' I said: 'you ain't more than a paragraph.'" The page happened to mention that he was born in the beginning of the year 513.

"It made the cold chills creep over me. I stopped and said, a little faintly, 'Now, maybe, I didn't hear you just right. Would you say that again, and say it slow. What year did you say it was?' '513.'

"'And, according to your notions, according to your lights and superstitions, what year is it now?' 'Why,' he said, 'the year 528, the 19th of June.' Well, I felt a mournful sinking of the heart and muttered: 'I shall never see my friends again—never see my friends any more; they won't be born for as much as a thousand years.'"

The audience had often been interrupted by laughter, but at the originality and fun of that conceit his auditors laughed until they cried, and kept on laughing with renewed outbursts over and over again. How the cute Yankee determined to get at the bottom facts about the year by watching for a total eclipse of the sun that he remembered the almanac of 1884 had spoken of as having occurred in 528, will have to be learned from the book when it appears.

"I made up my mind to two things. If it was still the nineteenth century and I was among lunatics and could not get away, I would boss that asylum or know the reason why, and if, on the other hand, it was really the sixth century, all right. I didn't want any better thing; I'll boss the whole country inside of three months, for I judged I'd have the start on the best educated man in the kingdom by 1300 years. * * * But I'm not a man to waste time, so I said to the boy, 'Clarence, if your name should happen to be Clarence, what's the name of that duck, that galoot, who brought me here?'"

The galoot turned out to be Sir Kap, the Seneschal. In the natural course of the story came the charming description of the interior of King Arthur's castle, leading us up to a royally funny account of the competitive lying of the gallant knights about their feats of arms. The transposed Smith looked upon the knights as a sort of "white Indians," admired their bigness and their simplicity, and eventually concluded:

"There didn't seem to be brains enough in the entire nursery to bait a fishhook, but you didn't mind that after a little while, for you saw that brains were not needed in a society like that, and would have marred its symmetry and spoiled it."

Everybody goes to sleep when Merlin reels off that same old story about Excaliber. Guinevere makes eyes at Launcelot in a way that would have got him shot in Arkansas. King Arthur orders the Yankee to go to some unknown place not down in any map, capture a castle, kill the colossal saucer-eyed ogre who owned it, and release sixty royal princesses. Of course he went, but he reflected:

"Well, of all the d——d contracts this is the boss! I offered to sublet it to Sir Launcelot—to let him have it at ninety days with no margin; but 'No,' he had got a better thing. He was going for a menagerie of one-eyed giants and a college of princesses."

It occurs to him finally, after wondering if a compromise with the ogre wouldn't work, simply to go back and tell the King, with artistic circumstantiality of detail, that he has killed the ogre. He does so, and, of course, the King and his knights, who are used to swallowing each other's huge lies, readily take in his, and a brilliant career opens before him as the boss liar of the court.

He took a contract from King Arthur to kill off, at one of the great tournaments, fifteen kings and many acres of hostile armored knights. When, lance in rest, they charged by squadrons upon him, he, behind the protection of a barbed wire fence charged with electricity, mowed them down with Gatling guns that he had made for the occasion. He found that the "education of the nineteenth century is plenty good enough capital to go into business in the sixth century with," and the next year he was running the kingdom all by himself on a moderate royalty of 40 per cent.

He spoiled the ogre business; cleared out the fuss and flummery of romance; and put King Arthur's kingdom on a strictly business basis. Inside of three and a half years the improvement was complete. Cast-iron clothes had gone out of fashion. Sir Launcelot was running a kind of Louisiana lottery. The search for the Holy Grail had been given up for a hunt for the northwest passage. King Arthur's 140 illustrious knights had turned themselves into a stock board, and a seat at the round table was worth $30,000.

DOMESTIC VIEWS.—The small boy was regaling a visitor with the family album.

"Who is this one?" asked the victim as he began the photographic volume.

"Oh, that's gramp' and here's gram' rite acrost the leaf."

"And this pretty lady?"

"That chromo's Ant Suke; she's a terror. An' that fel that looks as ef he didn' know beans is nunkey."

"Who are the two taken together."

"That's pop an' mam, only they ain't fitin' there."

"And this swee child?"

"That's me when I was a kid. An' that's pop's first wife what died; an' that's another nunkey. Say, he don't look like a bird, does he? Pop says he's a real old gallus bird; an' this—"

The entrance of the family prevented further disclosures.